



**CITY OF NEWPORT BEACH**

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April 9, 2020

Dear Class of 2020:

You should be hurtling toward an end to your high school career with all of the pomp and circumstance that comes with celebrating thirteen years of primary education. Unfortunately, we are not living in normal times. We are instead living through a time that can prepare you more to be adults than the final few months of any senior year could.

You are being given a taste of an unstructured freedom that usually only comes with a summer break. It may sound wrong to say that you have more freedom while also being told to stay at home the vast majority of every day. But what you do with these days, weeks, and months ahead can and will shape your character for years to come.

Admittedly, I am closer to your parents' ages than yours. I graduated high school in 2001, when some of you were born. Downloading a two-minute video took hours over dial-up internet. iPads, Kindles, etc. didn't exist. (I hope that someday you will write a similar paragraph and feel as old as I do right now.)

Compared to twenty years ago, you have truly been raised in an information world unlike any other in human history. The eBranch at our Newport Beach Public Library alone contains more information than you could read in ten lifetimes. Free online lectures from truly brilliant people have increased exponentially. You have the ability to not just talk to extended family and friends, but to also see them in real time.

My suspicion is that you have recognized by now that nothing replaces interacting in person. That structure can feel burdensome until the structure is suddenly taken away. For some, this sudden change has surely caused you mental anguish. You are not alone in your feelings. If you or a loved one or a neighbor are having a tougher go than you think that you can bear, just know that there are a lot of resources available. You are not alone.

To those of you who had extracurricular activities in the spring that have been suddenly cancelled, I understand your frustration. Nothing can replace an unplayed season, a prepared but undelivered speech, or hours of practice with no performance. During what has been a particularly difficult year as Newport Beach Mayor, I have turned occasionally to a century-old quote from former President Teddy Roosevelt, who said: “The poorest lesson that any American can be taught is the lesson of trying to merely have a good time, of trying to shirk what is hard and unpleasant.”

That quote can and will apply throughout our lives. Character is rarely refined or advanced in moments of relative ease. So, how will you approach what is hard and unpleasant right now? I have a few broad suggestions.

First, keep yourself and your family safe. You can do that by following orders and guidance from public health experts. You are safer at home and should leave only for essential activities. The State Parks’ current guidance recommends that you do the following when you go outside for exercise and mental wellness: (1) stay home if you are sick; (2) stay close to home when you get outdoors. This is not the time for a road trip to a destination park or beach; (3) venture out only with people in your immediate household; (4) walk around the neighborhood and enjoy neighborhood parks; (5) always maintain a physical distance of 6 feet or more when recreating in the outdoors. If you cannot maintain physical distancing, leave the park; and (6) do not congregate in parks.

Second, spend some time learning more about your family. Find out what your parents and grandparents were like when they were your age. By your age, I had only one surviving grandmother and to this day wish that I had spent more time with her.

Third, create your own structure. A famous business consultant named Peter Drucker wrote a book recently where he repeated advice from his piano teacher: “You will never play Mozart the way Arthur Schnabel does, but there is no reason in the world why you should not play your scales the way he does.” In other words, you can set yourself up for success right now by developing good practices that you can take forward in life.

Finally, find ways to contribute to your community in positive ways (while observing recommendation number one). My position as Mayor has afforded me a unique position to see and observe so many different ways that people have stepped up in this crisis. Please keep an eye out for ways to help out in your neighborhood and communities.

We at the Newport Beach City Council are thinking of you during this difficult moment. We work well and regularly with the Newport Mesa Unified School District Board of Education. And I am a big fan of your Principal, Sean Boulton. We all signed up for service to our community no matter what comes our way. Someday you will have the same chance to serve

your community and I hope that you will. The more you prepare now, the better equipped you will be later.

Be well,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Will O'Neill', written in a cursive style.

Mayor Will O'Neill